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KURT SCHWITTERS

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The Galerie Chalette is deeply indebted to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, and the Herbert and Nanette Rothschild Fund for having made available to this exhibition Schwitters' work. We are grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Auchincloss, Mrs. Henry Epstein, Mr. William S. Lieberman, Mr. and Mrs. Albert A. List for the loans from their collections.

Our special thanks go to Dr. Charlotte Weidler from whose archives we borrowed the manuscript of the poem „My House" as well as the other Schwitters writings and documents with the exception of "Die Kathedrale" which was lent by the Museum of Modern Art

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1963

Kurt Schwitters

GALERIE CHALETTE 1100 MADISON AVE. NEW YORK

37
Kurt Schwitters
by Fred Dolbin

Art is a primeval concept, sublime as divinity, inexplicable as life, indefinable and without purpose.

The work of art is formed through artistic evaluation of its elements. I only know how I create it, I only know my material, on which I draw, I do not know for what purpose.

The material is as unessential as I am myself. Essential is only creating. Because the material does not matter, I use any material whatsoever if the picture requires it. By tuning diversified materials to each other, I have an advantage over "mere-painting"; for in addition to playing color against color, line against line, form against form, and so on, I also play material against material, like wood against sackcloth. I call the WELTANSCHAUUNG from which this kind of artistic creation evolves MERZ.

The word "MERZ" had no meaning when I formed it. Now it has the meaning I endowed it with. The meaning of the concept "MERZ" changes with the change in the perception of those whose work carries on the idea.

"MERZ" demands liberation from all constraint in order to create artistically. But freedom is not lack of restraint but the result of strict artistic discipline. "MERZ" also means tolerance towards any limitations imposed for artistic reasons. Thus an artist should be permitted to make a painting merely from two pieces of blotting paper as long as he is really creating.

The representation of elements of nature is not essential to a work of art. But representation of nature, although inartistic in itself, may become an artistic element in a picture if used in proper relationship to other parts of that picture.

5
King Edward and
Emperor William II

6
Die Handlung spielt
in Theben

graziös
Wirke, weil es Tag
Lindener Deiner Kräfte still
Nütze die
Unterla
wildes Klima.
Die Handlung spielt in Theben und Memphis zur Zeit der Herrschaft der Pharaonen.

9
Er und Sie

18
Beautycare

9

At first, I had also concerned myself with other art forms, for instance, poetry. The elements of poetry are the syllables, words, sentences. By relating these elements to each other, poetry is created. Meaning is only essential if it is taken as one such factor. I play sense against nonsense. I prefer nonsense; however, this is purely a personal matter. I am sorry for the nonsense, because up to now it has been rarely used artistically; that is why I love nonsense . . .

The preoccupation with various art forms has been an artistic need for me. The reason for this was by no means the impulse to enlarge my field of activity but the aspiration not to become a specialist of one kind of art but to be an artist. My aim is the MERZ-Universal-Artwork.

KURT SCHWITTERS*

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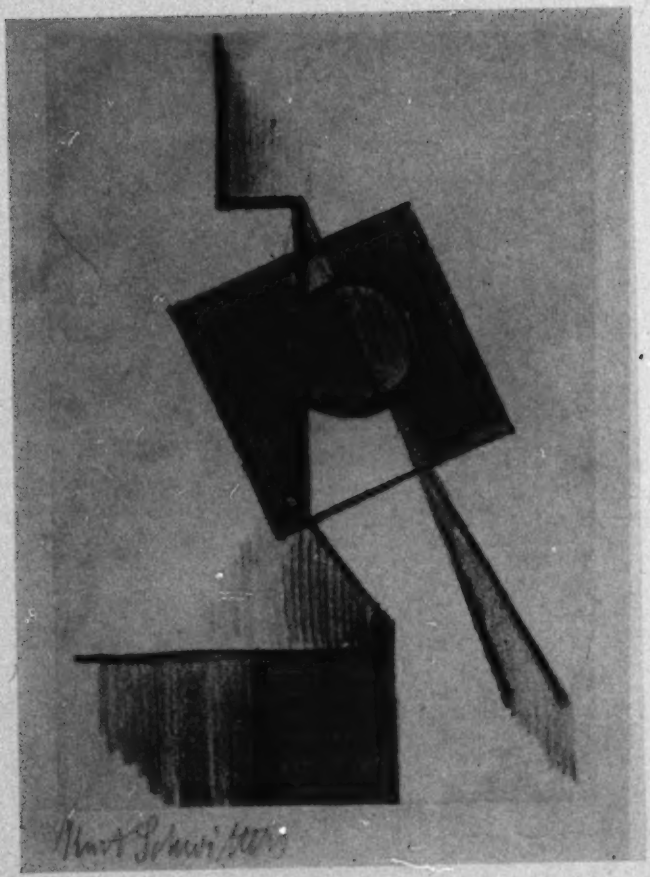
* Translation of excerpts from the original German text by Schwitters written in 1920 and published in "ARARAT", December 1922

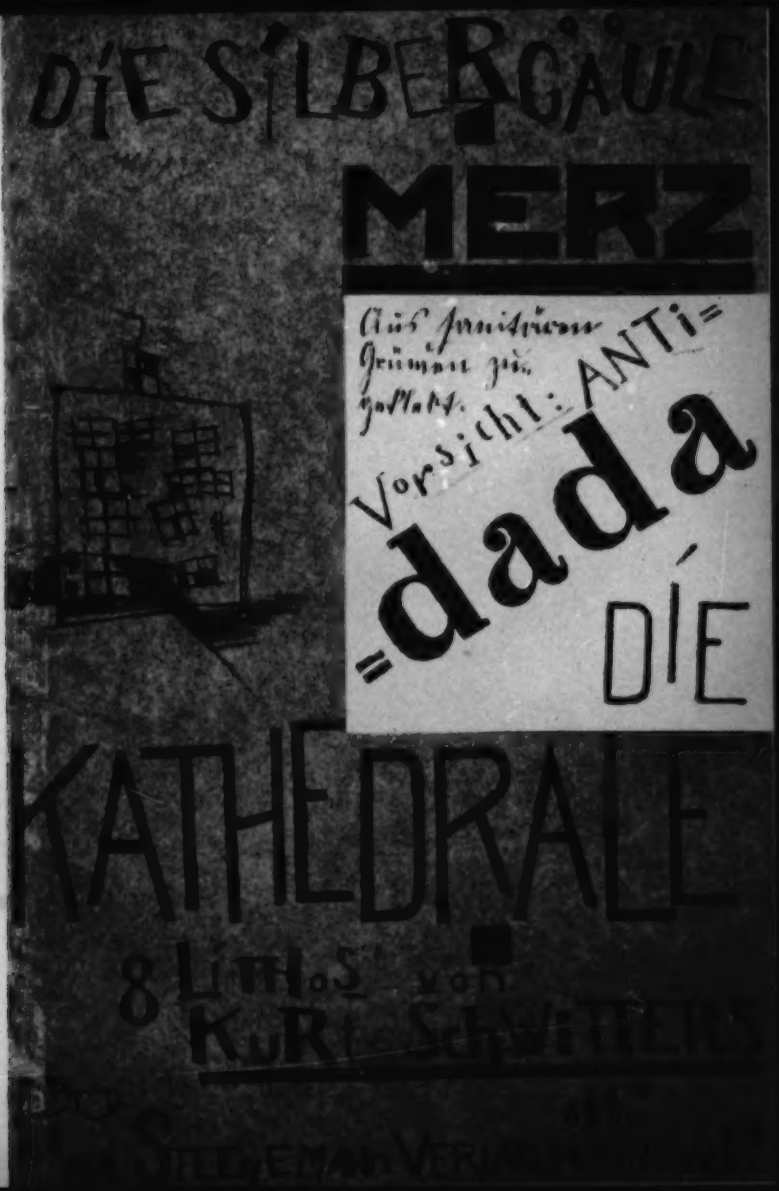
23
Merz 372

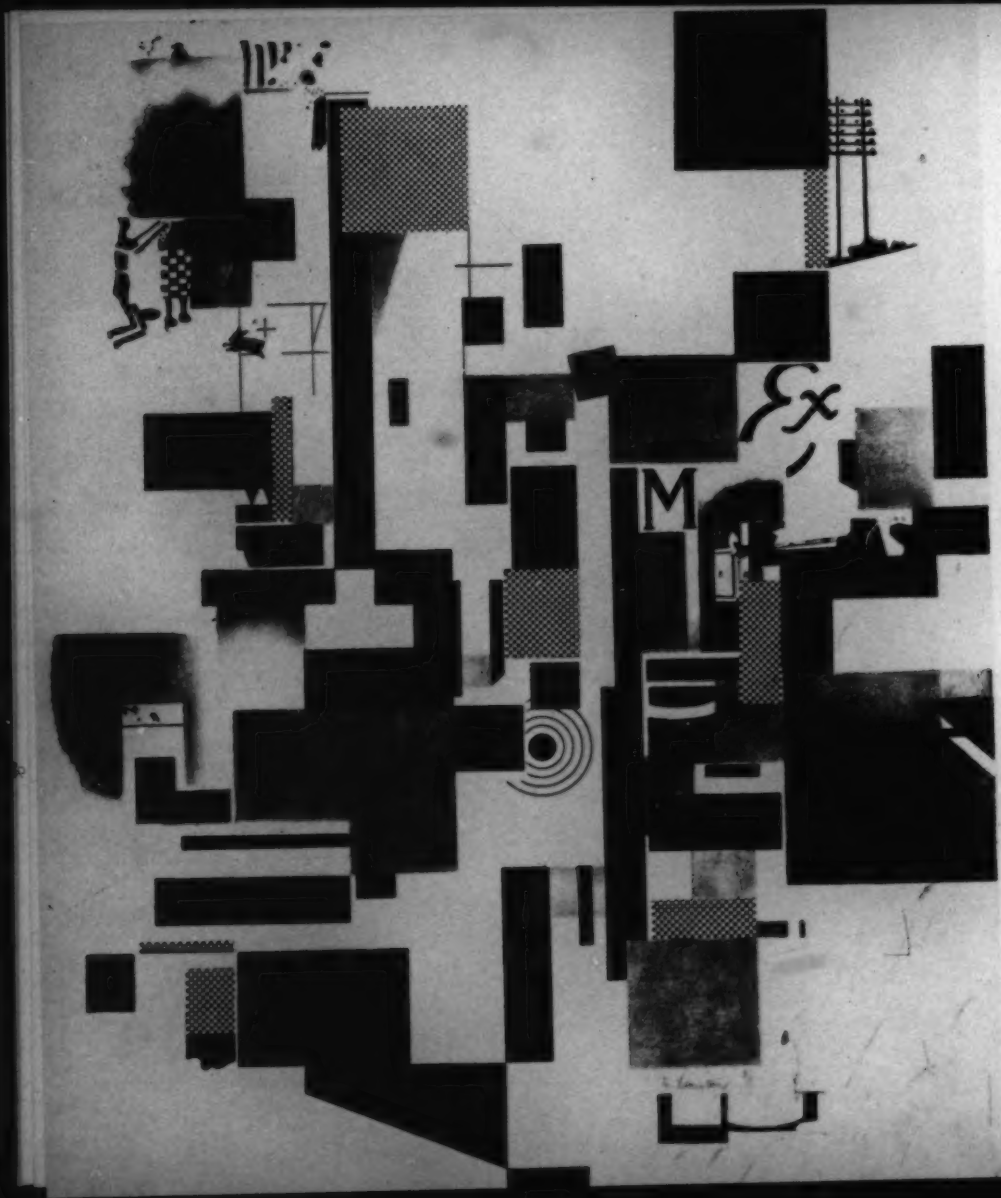
11



24
Structural
Composition

11
Cover of
"Die Kathedrale"





25
Plate I
from
Merz-Mappe

. . . Art is a product of each particular era. As the periodical G writes, "Just do not let us have eternal truth." There is only a truth of the present as there was a truth of the past. MERZ attempts to find the truth of our era . . .

The word "style" is already worn thin; yet it describes best the efforts of artists typical of our times. I call style the standardization of means and the levelling of intentions to a joint will of creating. Today striving towards a style has become more important than striving towards art. One should differentiate keenly between STYLE and ARTISTIC CREATING. Style is expression of the joint will of many, preferably of all, a democracy of creative will. Since most people, and occasionally some artists, are fools, and since most fools are sure of their cause, and since all people can reach agreement only at some mid point, consequently, most of the time, style becomes a compromise of art and non-art, of play and purpose. Artistic creation does not know any purpose. The work of art evolves from its own properties. These are not ambiguous. Art is only balance attained by weighing all elements. Only if creators would agree on this principle, could there be style which would also be art . . .

Style is creation from standardized forms according to individual laws. Imitation is indiscriminate copying of any forms, even of standardized forms without any laws. Do not be deceived when imitators claim they strive for style, nor when the imitator attempts to camouflage his imitations by shrewdly cooking up a stew from various ingredients. Such soup is not style but swindle. The imitator has no roots whatsoever. Since, artistically speaking, he is dead, he needs no nourishment. He lives more or less like a good mirror, reflecting some living thing. Since he has no roots, anybody can overthrow him. And a special mark of all imitators is that they are often overthrown. Since the imitator does not grow, he can not help to create a style, because he himself withers. And finally the

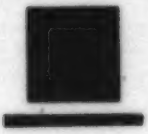
79
Red on Red

Title-page from
"Die Scheuche"

DIE SCHEUCHE X

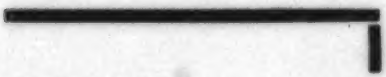
Es war einmal ne Vogelscheuche

die hatte einen Hut-Schapo

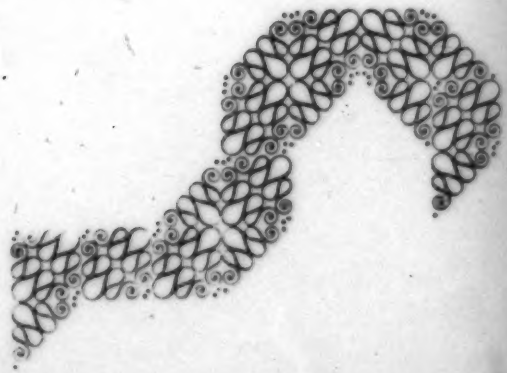


und einen Frack

und Stock



und einen ACH



so schönen Spitzenschal

32
Okolade

28
Einhundert-
tausend Mark

Section
of first
MERZ-Bau

undigested bits taken from others, decompose in his stomach and he rots from inside out. Some have perfume, but to a fine nose, the foulness from their intestines cannot be stenched away, nor stenched to death. Imitators, watch your step.

KURT SCHWITTERS*

* Translation of excerpts from the original German text by Schwitters in "MERZ 6", 1923.

36
"R."

22

39
Untitled Mz 30, 38

When I first visited Schwitters in Hannover, where he was born and where he lived, before the Nazis had driven him out, he showed me—after the proper psychological preparation —his most deeply loved work—"the Schwitters column". At the end of the corridor on the second floor of the house which Schwitters had inherited, a door led into a medium sized room. An abstract plaster sculpture stood in the center of that room. At that time it took up about one quarter of the space and reached almost to the ceiling. It resembled —if anything that Schwitters made could be said ever to resemble something—early sculptures of Domela and Vontongerloo. But here it was not just a sculpture, it was a living documentation of Schwitters and his friends, changing from day to day. He explained this to me, and I could see that the entire sculpture was a combination of caves; a structure of concave and convex forms, which hollowed and inflated it. Each of the special forms had a "meaning". There actually was a Mondrian-cave, an Arp-cave, a Gabo-cave, a Doesburg-, Lissitzky-, Malevich-, Mies van der Rohe-, Richter-, Werner Graeff-cave. One cave for his son and one for his wife. Each cave contained very personal details of the lives of these people. He cut off some of my hair and put it in my cave. A fat pencil pilfered from Mies van der Rohe's drafting table was in his space. Of others, there was a piece of shoe lace, a half smoked cigarette, a cut-off fingernail, a piece of tie (Doesburg's), a broken pen. But also some strange and more than strange items as, for instance, part of a dental bridge with some teeth attached and even a small bottle filled with urine with the name of the donor. All this was put in separate holes which were reserved for the individual places. Some of us had several caves, according to Schwitters' changing whim . . . and the column grew.

When I came to see him again, three years later, the column had changed completely. To begin with, all the small caves and hollows which we had then "inhabited" were no longer visible. "They are now all deep inside" Schwitters explained. In fact they were

33
Das Gustave-
Finzler-Bild

31
Rotes Dreieck

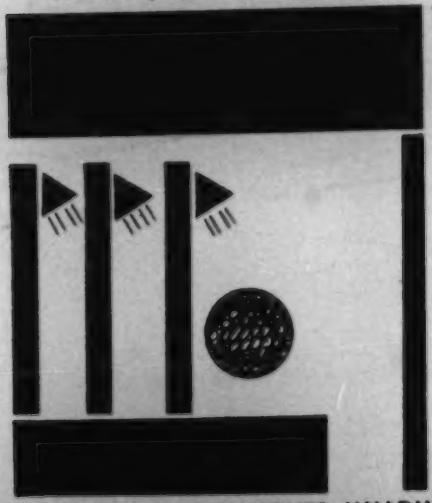
Cover of Merz 21
"Erstes Veilchen-Heft"

MERZ 21
erstes VEILCHEN=
HEFT

Eine kleine Sammlung von Merz-Dichtungen aller Art

von Kurt Schwitters.

1931



MERZ-VERLAG, HANNOVER, WALDHAUSENSTRASSE 5

42
Ein Beitrag zur
Sanierung
Deutschlands

40
Untitled Mz 30, 34

covered by the monstrous growth of this column, covered by other plastic eruptions, new people, new forms, colors, and details. A vegetation which never ends. And if the column could be said to have had then a more or less constructivist appearance, it was now much more curved . . .

Because it had grown overwhelmingly, and was still growing, it had burst the seams of the room, so to speak. Since Schwitters could not add anything in width, if he wanted to be able to walk around it, he had to move upwards. But there was the ceiling! Schwitters found therefore, the "easiest" solution. As owner of the building, he gave notice to the tenants above, pierced the ceiling, and continued the column on the upper floor.

I never saw it finished. The fact is, it had never been finished. I left Germany before Hitler and heard from Schwitters only when he came to Norway, one step ahead of the Nazis who had ordered his arrest in Germany. Indeed, he started a new column in Norway, and when he left there, a third one in England. But he never forgave the Nazis for having destroyed his life's work, the work with which he had identified himself more than any other, a work which in the truest sense of the word, physically and spiritually, had grown with him through all the stages of life . . .

HANS RICHTER*

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* Translation of excerpts from the original German text by Hans Richter published in "Dada Profile", Die Arche, Zürich, 1961.

43
Amsterdam

31

And so Schwitters has completed his earthly voyage. He achieved this with much jesting and joking. His droll acts had little to do with those of the monstrous creatures which were possessed by the machine. He comprehended how materialistic progress distorted men. The hideousness of this cancer provoked Schwitters' transmutation. In this horrible macabre bloom, beauty had frozen in its forms and colors and died. Schwitters pleaded with fervor for a deliverance from this obscure world, from this poisoned nature. And joy and absolute serenity imbued and transformed rubbish . . .

With what irresistable flourish he sang, trilled, murmured, blustered, shouted his "Sound Sonata" until he shook his audience from its apathy!

His "MERZ images" are full of secrets and wisdom. Through them Schwitters taught us to see life and beauty in the most insignificant things, in a tram ticket which one discards, in a crumpled piece of paper. He believed, as Heraclit did, that in reality the sun is not any larger than it appears to us . . .

Behind all masks and programs Schwitters discovered the sense of life; the metamorphosis of the visible and tactile life towards universality without form. His playful spirit has now joined the measure of all things. There is nothing left to us but to embrace his memory with ethereal praise.

JEAN ARP*

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* Translation of excerpts from the original French text by Arp published in "Onze peintres, vus par Arp", Girsberger, Zürich, 1949.

44
Koranleaf

33

45
St. Pauls

MY HOUSE

I am to build a house of ice,
Because it is more liquid.
I build all my thoughts into this house.
There are the walls and windows
And all the furniture . . . and me.

Through my thoughts
Through my soul
There are deep and great thoughts,
Thoughts how to love in this world,
About eternal laws,
Thoughts through my will.
There is a grand feeling about all beauty of the world
Thoughts of the greatness of Art.

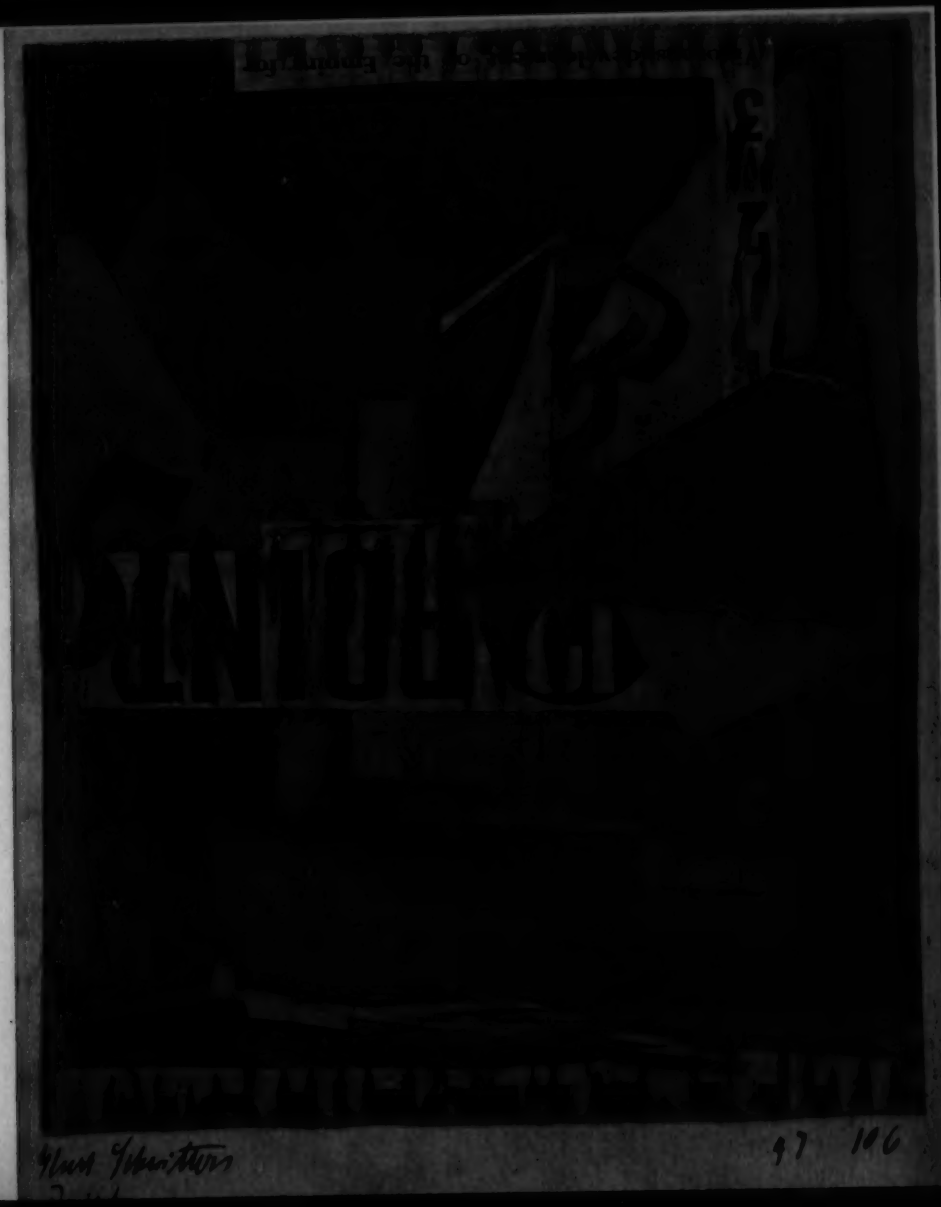
Art is god and philosophy,
And then it gets warm,
And all melts.
And nobody knows what I was thinking.
And then I invite all photographers of the world to
come and register all what I have done.

And then it gets warm before they arrive and all melts,
The great and deep thoughts melt,
My willpower melts,
The beauty of my world melts,
The greatness of my art melts,
All melts, and nobody knows then,
Of all this.

But other people build other houses of ice.

15. 12. 45

46
Point



37

47
I'll Answer it

CHRONOLOGY

1887 Kurt Schwitters is born on June 18th in Hannover, Germany.

1909—1914 Studies art in Dresden and in Berlin.

1915—1918 Marries Helma Fischer with whom he settles down in a house at strasse 5 in Hannover which is to become the home of his MERZ-B Devotes himself briefly to the study of architecture. While pain and landscapes to earn a livelihood, experiments with abstract creates his first abstract collage-paintings which are being s gallery DER STURM in Berlin.

1919—1920 Becomes interested in DADA and starts an archive of the DA The Hannover DADAISTS gather around him. Soon he deviate and develops his own conception, a kind of first cousin to Its political overtones.
He creates his first MERZ-painting, a combination of collage, construction. He names it MERZ after the last syllable of the w which he cuts from an advertisement of the Kommerz- and Pri then on the word-fragment "MERZ" becomes a symbol. It ide writings, poetry, painting, and graphic art. It also comprises his world philosophy.
Schwitters has his first exhibition at the gallery DER STURM toge and Molzahn.
Reproductions of his work, his own MERZ-prose and MERZ-poet articles about him, begin to appear in periodicals such as DER STUR DER ZELTWEG, DER ZWEEMANN, etc.

1920 DIE KATHEDRALE, a collection of 8 lithographs by Schwitters, is pub Steegemann, and DER STURM devotes its STURMBILDERBUCH IV to hin A collection of his work is acquired by KATHERINE S. DREIER and SOCIETÉ ANONYME in New York.
Schwitters begins work on his first MERZ-Bau.

That year he meets the Dadaists Arp and Hausmann who become his friends. His collection of poems ANNA BLUME is published by Steegemann and is attacked by Dadaist Richard Hülsenbeck in the DADA-ALMANACH.

DER MARSTALL, another Steegemann publication, prints a controversy in letter form for and against ANNA BLUME.

Schwitters is denied membership in the DADA-CLUB.

1921—1922 He exhibits in Munich, Hannover, and Dresden.

The DRESDEN MUNICIPAL GALLERY acquires his first MERZ-Bild of 1919 containing the work MERZ.

Schwitters participates in the Weimar DADA-Congress and accompanies Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann on a lecture tour to Prague, where for the first time, he hears Hausmann recite his sound poem "fmsbw".

Two more collections of poems are published under the titles DIE NEUE ANNA BLUME and AUGUSTE BOLTE.

The periodical DER ARARAT prints an autobiographical article.

1923 Schwitters begins publications of a magazine which he names MERZ and which continues until 1932 with a total of twenty-four issues.

MERZ publishes Schwitters' own MERZ-writings and reproductions of his work. Among its contributors and collaborators are the best-known painters and writers associated with Dada, der Stijl, and Constructivist orientations.

1924 Schwitters contributes his writings to various publications. The periodical G edited by Graeff, Mies van der Rohe, and Hans Richter publishes the article «Konsequente Dichtung» containing Schwitters' basic theories on phonetic poetry. It also carries the first reproduction of a MERZ-Bau section.

1925—1926 Inspired by Hausmann's sound poem, Schwitters writes his LAUT SONATA (Sound Sonata) which appears in record form as MERZ 13.

DER STURM publishes his MÄRCHEN VOM PARADIES (Tales of Paradise) written in collaboration with Käte Steinitz, and gives him another exhibition. Schwitters also exhibits at the Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover.

He completes the first part of his MERZ-Bau.

DIE SCHEUCHE, a typographical fairy tale, is published in Hannover.

1927—1929 Schwitters' first article in English appears in TRANSITION.
MERZ 20 publishes a catalogue of his most important work. He participates in the "Great Berlin Art Exhibition" and "Abstract and Surrealist Painting and Sculpture" at the KUNSTHAUS Zürich, and is commissioned to do the typography for the "Dammerstock Exhibition" in Karlsruhe, organized by Gropius and devoted to modern housing.
He contributes to the first two issues of the newly founded magazine CERCLE ET CARRÉ which is edited by Michel Seuphor and participates in an exhibition organized by CERCLE ET CARRÉ at GALLERY 23 in Paris.
Makes his first trip to Norway with wife and son.

1931 MERZ 21 ERSTES VEILCHENHEFT contains further descriptions of the MERZ-Bau which he has divided in sections and named: THE KATHEDRAL OF EROTIC MISERY, NIBELUNGEN TREASURE, KYFFHÄUSER, GOETHE GROTTO, BRAUNSCHWEIG-LÜNEBURG, SEX MURDER CAVE, RUHR DISTRICT, ART EXHIBITION, DOGHOUSE, THE ORGAN, THE TEN PERCENT WAR INVALIDS, MONNA HAUSMANN, BROTHEL, GROTTO OF LOVE, LAVATORY ATTENDANT OF LIFE.

1932—1934 The last issue of MERZ appears with the final version of the URSONATA (Primeval Sonata).
Schwitters associates himself with the Paris abstract movement ABSTRACTION CREATION whose magazine publishes an illustrated article about him.
Upon the death of THEO VAN DOESBURG Schwitters writes the obituary for DE STIJL.

1936 The work of Schwitters is included in two exhibitions, "Cubism and Abstract Art" and "Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism", which are organized by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

1937—1938 In the campaign against "Degenerate Art" the Nazi government confiscates his works owned by various German Museums, four of which are included in the exhibition "Degenerate Art" which the Nazis show in Munich and Berlin.
Schwitters leaves Germany and moves permanently to Norway and settles in Lysaker near Oslo.
Several of his works are exhibited in "Modern German Art" at the Tate Gallery in London.
He begins construction of his second MERZ-Bau.

1940—1941 When Germany invades Norway in April 1940, Schwitters escapes with his family to Scotland where he is interned for seven months. After his release he moves to London and attempts to earn a living by portrait painting.

1943 The MERZ-Bau left behind in Hannover, as well as much of his other work and many documents, are destroyed by fire when a bomb hits his home.

1944—1946 Schwitters suffers a stroke after which he moves to Ambleside, his last residence, where in a barn at Cylinder Farm, Langdale, he begins work on a third MERZ-Bau, made possible by a grant from the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In collaboration with Raoul Hausmann he conceives a new magazine called PIN which is being published in London.

1948 Exhibits at Pinacotheca Gallery, New York.

On January 7th, Schwitters receives his British passport.

The following day he dies of a heart ailment and is buried in the churchyard at Ambleside.

His last MERZ-Bau is unfinished.

KURT SCHWITTERS, a tribute by Jean Arp is published in his ONZE PEINTRES, VUS PAR ARP, Zürich 1949.

1949—1956 Major exhibitions of Schwitters' work take place in Europe and America at Berggruen and Cie, Paris; Sidney Janis, New York; Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover; Stedlijk Museum, Amsterdam; Lord's Gallery, London.

Stefan Themerson publishes KURT SCHWITTERS IN ENGLAND.

1960 The XXXth Biennale in Venice honors Schwitters with a major retrospective exhibition.

1961 Schwitters is featured prominently in the exhibition "The Art of Assemblage" organized by William Seitz at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Galleria Schwarz, Milan, has a Schwitters show.

1962—1963 "50 Collages by Schwitters" are shown at Sidney Janis, New York.

London's Marlborough Gallery has major retrospective exhibition.

Travelling exhibition featuring 85 works is organized by William Seitz and shown at the Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, N. J.; the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; University of Minnesota; Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION*

1	Die Verkündigung Z 111	Crayon Drawing	1918	5¹/₄x4¹/₈"
2	Houses and Trees	Charcoal Drawing	1918	4⁷/₈x6⁷/₈"
3	Houses	Charcoal Drawing	1918	7³/₈x5¹/₈"
4	Stadt. Z 47 Anna Blume Series	Crayon Drawing	1918	6¹/₄x4³/₈"
5	King Edward and Emperor William II	Collage	1918	5¹/₂x4¹/₈"
6	Die Handlung spielt in Theben	Collage	1918	6¹/₂x7⁷/₈"
7	Anna Blume	Stamp Drawing with Collage	1918	9³/₄x7³/₈"
8	Der Sturm	Drawing with collage on 2 sides	1918	7³/₈x6³/₄"
9	Er und Sie	Watercolor and Drawing	1919	9¹/₈x7¹/₄"
10	Merz-Bild 5B (Bild Rotherz-Kirche) Collection: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.	Collage on board	1919	32⁷/₈x23³/₈"
11	Cover of Die Kathedrale 1 of 8 Lithos published in brochure form by Paul Steegemann, Verlag, Hannover Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Gift of Edgar Kaufman, Jr.	Litho with collage	1920	5³/₄x8³/₄"

* Works marked with an asterisk are illustrated in color.

12	Mending, Merz 156 Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Drawing	1920	8x6¼"
13	Mit Frau Schwitzend, Merz 163 Collection: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.	Collage	1920	11⅞x8¾"
14	Merz 22 Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest	Collage	1920	6⅜x5⅜"
15	Untitled Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Collage	1920	14¼x12⅛"
16	Untitled, Merz 185	Collage	1920	5¼x4¼"
17	Echte Apfelsosse	Watercolor	1920	9⅜x7⅛"
18	Beautycare	Collage	1920	5¼x3⅜"
19*	Merz 275 Leuner	Collage	1921	≈
20	Ine Dresd, Merz 330 Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Albert A. List	Collage	1921	8¼x6⅛"
21	Schwimmt, Merz-Bild 14C Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Collage	1921	6¼x4⅛"
22	Cherry Picture Collection: Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Mr. & Mrs. A. Atwater Kent, Jr., Fund	Collage	1921	36¼x27¾"

23*	Merz 372	Collage	1922	6x4⅞"
24	Structural Composition	Drawing	1923	7x5"
25	Plate I from Merz-Mappe 1 of 6 Lithos published in album form as Merz 3 Collection: Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Gift of J. B. Neumann	Litho with collage	1923	21⅞x16¾"
26	Merz-Zeichnung Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest	Collage	1924	7¾x6⅛"
27	Kopf	Collage	1924	4¾x3½"
28	Einhunderttausend Mark	Collage	1924	4¾x3½"
29	Red on Red	Collage	1924	7¾x6⅛"
30	Verschobene Flecken Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Oil and relief	1925	26½x19"
31	Rotes Dreieck Merz 26/30	Collage	1926	9½x8"
32	Okolade	Collage	1926	5¾x4⅛"
33*	Das Gustave-Finzler-Bild	Oil and collage	1926	30x24½"
34	Merz 17, Lissitzky Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest	Collage	1926	5½x4⅛"
35	Merz 30, 1927 Collection: Mrs. Henry Epstein	Collage	1927	7½x5¾"

36	"R."	Collage	1929	5¾x3½"
37	Kurt Schwitters by Fred Dolbin Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Drawing	1929—30	8½x10"
38	402 Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Collage	1930	6¾x5"
39	Untitled Mz 30, 38	Collage	1930	5⅝x4⅜"
40	Untitled Mz 30, 34	Collage on sandpaper	1930	4¾x4⅛"
41	Untitled	Collage	1931	5½x4¼"
42	Ein Beitrag zur Sanierung Deutschlands	Collage	1931	5⅞x4"
43*	Amsterdam	Collage	1937	6⅞x5⅜"
44	Koranleaf	Collage	1937	6½x5¼"
45	St. Pauls	Collage	1946	8x6⅜"
46*	Point	Collage	1947	7⅜x6⅛"
47	I'll Answer It	Collage	1947	8x6½"
48	ON — Merz x 6 Collection: Mr. William S. Lieberman	Collage	1947	2x1¾"
49	Untitled Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Auchincloss	Collage	1947	9x7½"
50	Merz-Bild 6D Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Collage	1947	12½x9¾"
51	Mending Collection: Herbert & Nanette Rothschild Fund	Collage	1947	10½x8½"

Photos: Otto Nelson, New York
Photo of MERZ-Bau:
Landesgalerie, Hannover

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